ADYAR POPULAR LECTURES No. I.

PUBLIC SPIRIT, IDEAL AND PRACTICAL.

A LECTURE

BY

ANNIE BESANT,

President of the Theosophical Society.

DELIVERED AT ADYAR, IN THE THEOSOPHICAL HALL, ON FEBRUARY 16TH, 1908.

THEOSOPHIST OFFICE :
ADYAR, MADRAS, S.

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PUBLIC SPIRIT—IDEAL AND PRACTICAL.

FRIENDS :

THE reason why I have taken up for our consideration this afternoon the virtue of public spirit, is that, during all the years that I have spent in India, I have preached, perhaps to weariness, the idea that all special and particular reforms would fail of their purpose, unless Indians went to the root of matter, the building of the character of the individual. Character of a noble type is the indispensable necessity for the success of every movement that aids in the shaping of a nation. No matter how good may be the object of a movement, even though it be directed to the noblest end, that movement will fail, if it be not carried out by men of high character, by men who are upright, public-spirited and sincere. You cannot build a good house out of rotten bricks ; you cannot build a great nation out of citizens of bad or indifferent character. As there is no house apart from its bricks, so there is no nation apart from its citizens. The citizens *are* the nation, and as is their character so must be the character of the nation.

Hence it is vital that the education given by any nation to its youth should include the building up of character by religious and moral methods, and an education that leaves out of account religion and morality is no true education at all. For this reason have I been

urging on the Indian community the establishment of a system of education in which religion and morality should form an integral part, for if here a great nation is to be built, if the united India we dream of is ever to become a reality in the world of men, it can only be by citizens trained along right lines, by men whose character is noble, reliable and worthy of trust. Righteousness, it is written truly in an old Hebrew scripture, righteousness exalteth a nation, and a nation that is not composed of righteous citizens is not one that has in it the possibility of enduring life.

Now one of the chief virtues necessary to the good citizen is public spirit ; without public spirit there is no nation. It is the foundation on which the national edifice must be reared. Hence it is most important that men and women, old and young, should understand what is meant by the civic virtue which we call Public Spirit. The training of youth in that virtue, the fostering of it where present, the implanting of it where absent, should form a part of national education. Unless we can teach our boys in schools, our young men in colleges, to practise this virtue while still they are young, in the small worlds of the school and the college, they are not likely, when they come to be men, to practise it in the larger life of the outer world, for the helping of India.

What is public spirit from the ideal standpoint ? It is the outer manifestation of the noble emotion called Patriotism, the love of country. Love of the country in which a man was born, in which he received his infant nurture, his youthful training, this is one of the feelings of the human heart called instinct, that is, the

heritage of the past, born with the individual into the present. It is found everywhere among civilised peoples, unless crushed out by most unfortunate circumstances. No one, who is susceptible to the higher emotions, is without this love of country, and out of this grows, in the noblest types, the all-embracing love of humanity, when a man can truly say with Thomas Paine, "The world is my country." Out of the emotion of patriotism, out of the love of country, grows the virtue of public spirit, which is patriotism manifesting in activity.

Remember the constant relation between emotions and virtues, for it will help you to cultivate the one into the other, as the flower grows out of the seed. Emotions grow in human nature, stimulated by particular circumstances and relations. All right emotions are forms of the primary Love Emotion. Man by his constitution cannot live happily in isolation ; he demands the presence of his kind ; he seeks to enter into relations with them, and is even classed by the naturalist as among "the social animals." He tends to live not merely in pairs, but in families, and the helplessness of the human infant necessitates the lengthening of the family relation. Hence, sexual passion grows into the enduring love of husband and wife ; maternal passion into patient parental love ; the family tie takes on a lasting character, and the emotions of family love, love of father and mother, of brother and sister, become lifelong. When these emotions overflow the family circle, when they become general instead of particular, principles instead of instincts, then they are virtues. A virtue is a general and lasting form of a

love emotion. "Treat all elders as fathers and mothers, all youngers as brothers and sisters," said Manu. Then the family emotion becomes the civic virtue.

Hence, I distinguish between the emotion of patriotism, the instinctive feeling of the human heart in civilised countries, and Public Spirit, the virtue which grows out of it. When the instinctive love of a man for his country grows permanent and action-compelling, then we have public spirit. Public spirit is a steady patriotism in action, the practical devotion to the native country, the service that grows out of love for the motherland. Without such love of country in the heart of Indians, India can never become a nation. You must love India as really and as practically as you love the mother who gave you your physical body. For has not your motherland given you your bodies; are you not born of her womb? *Vande mâtaram*, "worship the mother," is the natural and righteous cry of every patriot heart. It has sprung from a surge of passionate emotion, but it expresses the permanent attitude of civic virtue.

How, then, is the emotion of patriotism to be roused in the heart of youth, so that it may hereafter bear fruit in a useful life of citizenship?

By working back, and also by working forward.

Boys must be taught the story of India's past, as English boys are taught the story of Britain. As they learn to know that story, a natural pride of race will grow within them, and a desire to emulate the great deeds of their sires. At present they learn more of England than of India, more of Rome than of Rājputāna.

If I ask a boy to tell me something of Cæsar, he can answer me ; if I question him of Prithivirãj, his eyes are a blank. That ought not to be. Boys, when they are little children round their mother's knees, should be told the stories of the heroes of their past, as English children are told the stories of Alfred and of the Black Prince. They should be nurtured on these stories, and the school should carry on the lessons of the home. Thus is the seed of patriotism watered by the rain of the mighty deeds of heroes in the past, and grows into love of, and pride in, the motherland, and the longing to be worthy of a land so great.

The first place in Indian schools should be given to the history of India ; the second to the history of Britain, as that of the suzerain of the Empire ; the third to that of other lands.

I do not mean that no history save the history of India should be studied, but only that it should come first, as in England comes first the history of England, in France the history of France. In truth the history of England has great educational value in fostering public spirit, for it tells how a nation has slowly won its way to freedom, and has grown into a mighty power. It tells how a hardy race, in a little northern island, has made itself worthy of an Empire that encircles the globe. Much of the wave of national life now sweeping over India is due to the inspiration of English ideals of ordered liberty, to the breath of English freedom. The Englishman should not resent the desire to imitate which "is the sincerest flattery." Thus must education foster the spirit of patriotism.

But there is one thing that must never be forgotten. Patriotism is a *love* emotion. You must never mingle with your patriotism the poison of hatred, for hatred is the root of vices, as love is the root of virtues. When patriotism is poisoned by the hatred of other countries it becomes diseased, it loses its essence and its life. Patriotism grows by a natural evolution into love of all nations, and nationality becomes internationalism. Patriotism is a step to the wider, greater, love which is the love of all humanity, the crown of the world of the future. But patriotism, under the disease bred of the hate-poison, becomes race-aggressiveness, race-insolence, race-tyranny. These narrow the heart, and blind the intelligence.

Would you truly love your motherland, and do her service? Ah! then, never hate the peoples of other lands, nor use against them words of anger and contempt. Remember that greater even than patriotism is the love of humanity, and that the lesser must grow into the greater. On the other hand, love of humanity, except as an empty sentiment, is not found among people who are indifferent to the country which gave them birth. Love is an emotion that is ever expanding, but it expands from a centre. Love of the opposite sex grows into love of family; love of family grows into love of community; love of community grows into love of province; love of province into love of country; love of country into love of humanity. You may wisely distrust the professed love of a man to humanity, who is not a lover of his country, nor of his family; for the man who does not love the nearer will rarely love the further. His love is more

a sentiment of the lip than a compelling motive in the heart.

Public spirit is patriotism in action. Let us turn to its practical side. One of the first fruits of patriotism among Indian literary men should be the writing of the Indian history above alluded to, and of Indian stories, history and stories that would stir the enthusiasm of the young into whose hands they would pass. What nobler work of public spirit for the gifted writer than to provide the food on which the coming generations shall be reared into patriotism ?

It is rightly said that a public-spirited man is a man who cares for the weal of the nation as ordinary men care for their own. A public-spirited man cannot see with indifference anything which harms his native land. He identifies himself with the interests of his nation, and makes those interests his own. In order that you may begin to do this, you should study the lives of public-spirited men, and see how they acted under difficult circumstances, and learn from their experiences and their lines of action how to act wisely under the difficulties you yourselves may meet. For there is the danger in India, resulting from the dearth of public spirit in the near past, and the present rush of newly awakened life, that public spirit may express itself in rash and foolish ways, which may hinder, rather than help, the coming of freedom. The danger lies especially with the young, ardent and enthusiastic, easily excited to emotion, and easily stirred to action, for they tend to spring forward without thinking of the consequences that may ensue. Hence, it is vitally important that they

should understand what are the principles which rule a public-spirited man in a country in which public spirit is the growth of generations, which has won its way to liberty without the wild revolutionary outbreaks which have often drowned freedom in blood in other lands. For in England, the sturdy common-sense of the people has ever discountenanced appeals to riot, and even in the civil war which brought Charles I. to the block, the very war was serious, sober and respectful of law, and not a furious revolutionary outbreak.

A public-spirited man realises that society can only proceed safely to a good end by respect for settled order, respect for law, willingness to work patiently for an end recognised as desirable. The patriots whose names are most revered in England are those who built up liberty by law and ordered change, and who, if they ever took up the sword, took it up when all other means had failed, never in order to gain new liberty, but only to defend liberty already enjoyed, when that liberty was forcibly assailed. As Charles Bradlaugh once said: "Force should never be used by a true lover of his country to win a new liberty; it may only rightly be used to repel a forcible attempt to wrench away a liberty already possessed."

Mark the difference between the results of these ordered struggles for freedom in England, and the great revolutionary outbreak in France in the 'nineties' of the eighteenth century. The poverty and the misery of the French masses were so extreme and so intolerable, that the people rose in a mad fury, starvation-scourged, and swept away in one wild orgy of blood the men who had

oppressed them, and the very patriots who were seeking to bring a remedy to the ills which had driven them to despair. In the West is ever, at the foundation of society, a mass of ignorant men and women, brutalised as none in this country are, a brutalisation largely due to the drinking habit from which the poor in this country are still comparatively free. This lowest stratum of the population is always a suffering stratum, hungry, ill-clothed, ill-housed, seeing money wasted in frivolous amusements while its children are starving for bread. Such was the stratum that came to the top in the French revolution, maddened by intolerable sufferings. All the best men of the day, the workers for improvement, the writers, the teachers, were swept away in the surge of popular passion. Their heads fell under the guillotine by scores, by hundreds, because the reins of power slipped from hands too feeble to hold them into the hands of the momentary idols of the mob, each more extreme than his predecessor. Out of that disorder rose a new dictatorship, for the vast majority of people demand order at any price, even if they have to pay for it the price of freedom. And since that dread lesson, public-spirited men remember that, below the educated, there seethes an inarticulate mass, with passions easy to arouse, but, once aroused, uncontrollable.

In order to make clear what I mean, let me draw some illustrations from the life of Charles Bradlaugh, whose words I just quoted. I choose him, not only because of my love and admiration for that truly great man, but because he was continually engaged in struggles, and in the endeavour to resist oppression, and to widen the

bounds of liberty. If such a man, fighting against bad laws, ever strove to use law and not force, to work by law and not violence, surely his example may appeal even to the hottest among you, my younger hearers, for he was no weakling, no coward, no time-server, but a strong, proud, warrior spirit, throughout a life of struggle. Charles Bradlaugh began life as the son of a poor clerk, and only received his education at a national school till he was eleven years of age. From that time till his death he earned his bread. He educated himself, saving his pennies to buy grammars and dictionaries, sitting up at night, rising in the dark winter mornings, till he had taught himself Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He got engaged as an errand-boy in a lawyer's office, and then he studied law in all odd moments. Thus he strenuously trained himself for public life. You are lads in school and college ; look at this lad in his hard life of toil, and see how he studied before he acted, how he strove to fit himself for the life to which he aspired. And the result was that when he lay on his death-bed, dying from the results of injuries inflicted on him during his last struggle, he could say: "Never one man went to prison because of me ; never one woman wept for a husband taken away from his family, because he followed me."

How did he manage so fight to many battles, to win so many victories, and yet never, through that stormy life, to resort to any form of violence, or abate, in the minds of his followers, their respect for law and order ? By study and knowledge. He studied law, and used it to change the laws that were oppressive. But he would never risk the

peace of society, he would never shake the social fabric, because he was in too great a hurry to change things to think of the welfare of the people, their security and their happiness.

Let me shew you how he used law to change bad law. When he first wished to edit a weekly paper, the law of England demanded security of £500—Rs. 7,500—against sedition and blasphemy. 'Blasphemy' was any criticism of Christian dogmas: 'sedition' was any criticism of the Crown. When the security was demanded of him, he answered politely—he was always very polite—that he was a poor man, and could not afford to pay £500 a week for publishing his journal. A prosecution was threatened. He wrote saying that he was printer, publisher, editor, that no one else was responsible, and that he would attend to sell the paper to a policeman, if an appointment were made. Never was there so debonair and accommodating a subject for prosecution: all the evidence was ready to hand. In the court of first instance, Mr. Bradlaugh noticed that, by some oversight, the prosecution was founded on a number of the paper other than the one he had sold. He said nothing. He fought every point he could raise; every technicality was exhausted to weary and harass the Government prosecutor, but always with inexhaustible good temper and even gaiety. He appealed where appeal was possible; he delayed where delay was possible; the Government became annoyed, and feared to become ridiculous in this long war waged against an unknown opponent. At last, his ingenuity was exhausted, his last appeal decided against him. But one masked

battery remained ; the paper prosecuted was not of the issue he had sold. He raised the point that there was no proof that he had anything to do with the paper prosecuted. Great indignation. Even the Bench was taken aback. "But, Mr. Bradlaugh, here is your own letter, acknowledging all responsibility." "My Lord, that was the paper of the"—say 17th—I forget the date, "and this is the paper of the 24th." "But it is a continuing offence." "My Lord," meekly but perhaps a little dryly : "I never heard that if a man committed a burglary at No. 17, he could be convicted of it as being a continuing offence on evidence of a burglary at No. 24, which was not charged. In despair : "But, Mr. Bradlaugh, why did you not draw attention to it before ?" "My Lord, I did not know that it was my duty as defendant to correct the bad plea of the prosecutor." The whole costly trial failed, and everything had to be begun over again ; the Government entered a *nolle prosequi* and brought a Bill into Parliament to abolish newspaper security. The Bill passed into law, and John Stuart Mill wrote to Mr. Bradlaugh, congratulating him on having abolished the last fetters on the English press.

See how much was wrought by this legal way of resisting a bad law; there was no excitement, no violence, no suffering of guiltless men, no sending of irresponsible servants to jail for what he had done, but he alone, with his clever head, tilting in a solitary due with the Government, and winning by sheer skill of fence. When he had to fight in self-defence, he fought by legal means, and thus made oppressive laws ridicu-

lous, and educated public opinion by the struggle till it demanded the repeal of the law.

Charles Bradlaugh never quarrelled with the police, even under serious provocation, for he always said that the police represented order, stood between harmless people and the criminal classes, and even when they were rough or foolish, force should never be used against them. The public-spirited man looks beyond a personal annoyance of the moment, sees what is necessary for public peace and security, and recognises that the guardians of public order should be supported by every good citizen. While he defended rigorously the right of public meeting, he would ever try to minimise public inconvenience, and would always notify the police beforehand of his arrangements, so that they might take all necessary precautions. And his own "special constables" as he would call them, men chosen for controlled tempers, tact and physical strength, were so effective in preserving discipline, that his enormous meetings never caused any anxiety.

In his last great struggle with the House of Commons the same splendid public spirit was shewn. He tried every legal means of redress; he carried his grievance from court to court; the House of Lords gave him justice against his persecutors. He sat through the whole life of one House, an elected member, illegally kept out. He was elected over and over again, and still rejected. The law was powerless against the House. At last, he decided to present himself to take the oath; it was settled that a policeman should touch his shoulder, and thus make a legal assault, so that a last resort to law

might be made. From all parts of England men had flocked to London : sturdy miners from Northumberland and Durham, weavers from Lancashire, artisans of every kind, thousands upon thousands, demanding justice for "our Charlie." He bade them keep perfect order, remain outside the precincts of Parliament, remember that only law was their remedy ; a small number, one or two hundred, perhaps, carrying petitions to the House for his admission, went—as the law permits—into Westminster Hall. He had left me in charge, bidding me be careful that no collision should occur between these and the police, remembering the tens of thousands outside whom a spark might fire. He went alone to the lobby of the House. Presently we heard a crash—the crash of breaking glass, of shivering timber. "They are attacking him, and he is alone," was the cry, and the petitioners, in hot excitement, charged up the steps to dash away the police who guarded the entrance which led to the House. I threw myself between the police and the crowd. "Back, back ! he told us to keep the peace." There was a critical moment, and they drew back, and I led them away into Palace Yard. When we reached the Yard, he was there, outside the door, with a crowd of police round him ; he was still, as though carved in granite, white and silent, his coat torn, one arm hanging limply. We waited. He turned and walked slowly towards us. "Come", was all he said. And then : "Go home ; tell all my friends to go home. Let there be no trouble. We have done all we can." We drove, he, his daughters and myself, through that huge crowd of stalwart, eager,

men. "Let us break your way in for you, Charlie," was the cry. He sent them away, stern and still. I asked him afterwards why he stood there, through those minutes of tense suspense, and he said that he was bringing himself under control, battling against the temptation to raise his hand and call his people to his aid. "But some women would have been widows," he said sadly, and in that thought lay his reason for self-control. Inside the House, he had been set upon by a dozen policemen, brutally forced down the stairs, his muscles cruelly wrenched, so that he never recovered from his injuries. But he struck no blow; with all his sense of dignity outraged, of law trampled under foot, of brutal violence supreme in the very fountain-place of law, with thousands eager to fight, passionately longing to defend him, he crushed himself down with iron will, and remembered only public security, public peace. Never was he greater, nobler, than in that moment of his defeat, and well did he deserve the laurel wreath, laid by the House of Commons on his dying head, when it erased from its records, as against the constitution, every resolution passed for his exclusion during that prolonged struggle.

This is what, in free England, is meant by public spirit; the carrying on of a constitutional struggle, loyalty to duty, the prevention of bloodshed under the most aggravated sense of personal wrong, the bearing of suffering oneself, the guarding of others.

I have talked of England, because I want you to see how, in times of stress and struggle, the public-spirited man behaves, and how liberty grows there by respect for law and not by its upsetting.

There is another useful lesson to be learned by the study of English public life, and that is the way in which a man trains himself in local, in municipal work, for work in the larger area of public political life. Look at the career of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, as an example of this. He was a successful manufacturer of screws in Birmingham, and made screws better than his rivals in trade. He was elected to the municipality, and devoted himself to town improvement ; he made himself known as an efficient local worker, and was made Mayor. Birmingham became a model city for municipal management and enterprise. Birmingham sent Mr. Chamberlain to Parliament ; he spoke with knowledge, and made his mark. He became a Cabinet Minister. Young politicians would do well to take a lesson from him. Let them begin by improving the life of their own town ; let them see to its paving, its draining, its lighting, its general comfort and cleanliness ; let them learn to rule men on a small scale, and train themselves to be leaders in local politics. When they have become sound men of business, capable administrators in municipalities, then let them bring their trained abilities to the service of the same motherland in larger areas. I grant that the work is drudgery and is not exciting ; it is thankless work and hard work. But it is useful and solid, and it trains and disciplines. Much power already is in your hands in local affairs. Use it. Instead of saying ditto to the Collector in the Board Room and grumbling at him outside, do, as Municipal Councillors, work useful to your people.

Many sons of zemindars are among our school and college students. The college fees are paid out of the

ryots' earnings. But what do these lads know of the peasant's life in the country village, of his difficulties, his privations, his lack of knowledge? Is the zemindar who does not administer his own estate well fit to be a councillor in the administration of the estate of the nation? The peasants, the agricultural population and youths of the zemindar class, are your own men. You should try to educate them, to train them, to help them. The Indian peasantry are the most docile and teachable people in the world. We see terrible famines. But if every zemindar did his duty, there would be few famines.

Everything is left to Government, and when famine comes, there is desperate effort to save the peasants' lives. Let the zemindars not only improve agriculture and make irrigation general, but let them foster indigenous industries outside agriculture. India needs brains to plan improvements, and hearts to make willing sacrifices in raising the agricultural population out of the grip of the famine-fiend. This work needs no Government permission; for this no change in laws and politics is needed. But here lies the school for political training, and here the field for self-sacrifice.

My friends, my brothers, if you would have what you call political liberty—and you inevitably will have it—prove yourselves worthy of it by putting before you the ideal of public spirit, and by showing it out practically in your towns and districts. Let the common good be ever before you, as a thing to be striven for. There is no power that can stand against the will of a public-spirited and united people. But remember always, that in your own hands lies your own redemption. No Govern-

ment can redeem you, however sympathetic; no speaker can redeem you, however eloquent. A nation's liberty, a nation's happiness, must grow out of the brains and the hearts of her own people, and unless rooted in these, they have no possibility of life. For the greater part of my life I have lived among these questions, but it is not for me to take active part in your public life. In the first place, I am not born of your race, and the work must be done by Indians. In the second place, I am old, and my work is nearly over. But I can be useful to you in pointing out the dangers and the pitfalls, in telling how others have laboured, and in adding to your experience, at present so narrow, the wider and fuller knowledge gathered in a longer and varied life. I can help in the education of the future politicians, the future statesmen, those who shall be, in days to come, the citizens of an India, mighty, prosperous and free. It is for you to solve the nation's problems: for you to build India, to shape her destiny. May you, and tens of thousands like you, young lads, young men growing up into manhood, and beginning to feel within you the strong pulses of a national life, may you profit by the experience of those before you, may you learn to think before you speak, to understand before you shout; may you have that love of the people, and that spirit which sacrifices itself but does not sacrifice others; may you realise that nations are made by individuals worthy of the task, and that no great nation is born till her children have made her possible.